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PASTORAL LETTER – JUNE 2021

Dear friend,

There is a story that most of us know well.

It is a magnificent story that represents God as a forgiving father. With Father's Day scheduled to be observed this month, it is a story that assures us that our Heavenly Father will never give up on us—no matter what we have done, no matter where we have been, and no matter what we have not lived up to.

I am talking about the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Jesus casts God as the father who forgives two sons for individual offenses. The father forgives the youngest son's egregious request for his share of the inheritance while he, the father, was alive. This request was not only inappropriate, it was also biblically prohibited. The younger son leaves the house with his inheritance and squanders it all, "Livin' La Vida Loca." The father forgives him when he returns home with his life in tatters. The father also forgives his oldest son's self-righteous attitude. The oldest son protests and reproaches his father's decision to allow his youngest, disloyal, and wayward brother to return home.

This is a story that we know well, and that some of us know intimately. This is a story that represents our personal journey, if we are true to ourselves. We have been the youngest son. We have left home and wasted an opportunity. Or, we have been the oldest son. We have behaved in a sanctimonious manner toward others whose lives have fallen into disrepair.

The Dutch priest Henri Nouwen thought about the meaning of this parable in his personal life. He said:

“Jesus came to open my ears to another voice that says, ‘I am your God, I have molded you with my own hands, and I love what I have made. I love you with a love that has no limits.... Do not run away from me. Come back to me — not once, not twice, but always again. You are my child. How can you ever doubt that I will embrace you again, hold you against my breast, kiss you and let my hands run through your hair? I am your God — the God of mercy and compassion, the God of pardon and love, the God of tenderness and care. Please do not say that I have given up on you.... It is not true. I so much want you to be with me.... Do not judge yourself. Do not condemn yourself. Do not reject yourself. Let my love touch the deepest, most hidden corners of your heart....’”

Even if our personal relationship with our biological father has not been ideal, this story reminds us that our Heavenly Father will never fail us or abandon us. Our Heavenly Father wants us to return to Him. God, our Heavenly Father, invites us into a relationship of forgiveness and acceptance.

Back to the story of the Prodigal Son: one of the memorable lines in the story is when the wayward son says (and I paraphrase),

“Father, I’ve done a terrible thing. I have sinned against Heaven and before you. I am not worthy to be called your son. Take me on as one of your hired hands.”

The father responds (and I paraphrase), *“Son, I love you so much.”* And he embraces him and kisses him, saying something like this: *“You’re back, you’re back, you’re back!”*

Jesus told this parable to illustrate God’s love as our Heavenly Father, who created us in His image. Every time someone comes back home into the presence of the Almighty—into the presence of a loving God—there is a celebration in heaven. God rejoices that we have returned into the community of the forgiven.

So, as we take time to celebrate Father’s Day at a societal level, think about the grace and miracle of God’s love for us as our Heavenly Father. The popular Christian author Max Lucado said, ***“God has proven himself as a faithful father. Now it falls to us to be trusting children.”***

Blessings!

Pastor Luis Perez